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Chairman:	Ms. Gittens-Joseph	(Trinidad and Tobago)
later:	Ms. Paterson	(New Zealand)
later:	Ms. Gittens-Joseph	(Trinidad and Tobago)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 103: Social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, disabled persons and the family (*continued*) (A/55/74, A/55/139-E/2000/93, A/55/167, A/55/257-S/2000/766; E/2000/9; A/C.3/55/L.2)

Agenda item 104: Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons (*continued*) (A/55/167 and A/55/257-S/2000/766)

1. **Mr. Herrera Marcano** (Venezuela), said that over the past year a political transformation had taken place in Venezuela, and a new Constitution had been adopted. The latter acknowledged the individual as the focus of development, and provided for the rights inherent in social development in a context of full ethnic and gender equality and for participation by young people of both sexes in the development process. Programmes had been set up to cater for the specific needs of young people, including a youth employment and training programme and a prevention and social reintegration programme.

2. It also provided for the elderly, and considered both their material needs and their right to human dignity and autonomy. His Government planned to adopt legislation enshrining the rights of the elderly, and it supported the adoption of a revised plan of action on ageing.

3. The new Constitution also recognized the right of disabled persons or those with special needs to exercise their capabilities to the full. The Government had therefore adopted policies to promote training and access to the labour market for such people and supported initiatives to improve institutions and policies to favour them. In June 1999 it had signed the Inter-American Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination for Reasons of Disability.

4. The Constitution enshrined respect for the family, as the custodian of the cultural traditions and values of the country's peoples, and guaranteed equal protection for all. His delegation therefore awaited with interest the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family in 2004.

5. **Ms. Enkhtsetseg** (Mongolia) noted that much had been said about the challenge of globalization and the international developmental goals set by the various United Nations conferences in the 1990s. The next step, as the Secretary-General stated in his report (A/55/1), was to see a new commitment on the part of developing and industrialized countries to fulfil the commitments on which they had already agreed in principle.

6. Education was of particular importance to development. Yet over 113 million children had no access to primary education, 880 million adults were illiterate and gender discrimination continued to permeate the education system. The World Education Forum had set the goal of access to free and compulsory primary education for all children by 2015; in order to achieve that goal it would be necessary to marshall political will and commitment at the highest level. Her delegation, along with many others, therefore deemed it important and timely to launch a United Nations literacy decade. It therefore looked forward to receiving specific proposals on the subject together with an action plan as called for in General Assembly resolution 54/122

7. Cooperatives had an important role to play in social development. In addition to those which promoted employment and alleviated poverty, specialized cooperatives dealing with child care, care for the elderly or disabled people and other social service cooperatives were increasingly being created around the world. Since many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America were currently updating their legislation on cooperatives, her delegation considered that the proposed draft United Nations guidelines on the issue, which had been developed by experts from all over the world, should be adopted so as to enable Governments to develop an effective partnership with cooperatives.

8. In her country there were seven cooperative alliances, comprising 2,000 individual cooperatives. In 1998, the Government had adopted the National Programme for the Development of Cooperatives for the period 1998-2005. Although the basic policy was in place, however, cooperatives in Mongolia still faced difficulties in their everyday functioning owing to insufficient awareness on the part of decision-makers of their potential contribution to the attainment of social development goals. Some legislative loopholes therefore persisted, especially in relation to fiscal and taxation policy. With a view to redressing that situation, as well as sharing its experience with other countries, the Government planned to organize an international conference on cooperatives, in

cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations, in Ulaanbaatar in May 2001.

9. In relation to agenda item 104, she said that the elderly in Mongolia, although constituting only about 8 per cent of the population, needed particular support, in view of the continuing economic hardships connected with the country's transition to a market economy. A five-year National Programme on Health and Social Welfare of Older Persons had been initiated in 1999 and a number of social policy laws had been amended in order to provide better social welfare and income opportunities for older persons.

10. *Ms. Paterson (New Zealand), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.*

11. **Mr. Bhattacharjee** (India) said that the trends identified in the 2000 *Report on the World Social Situation* were disturbing. Developing economies had suffered a severe setback in the 1990s with near stagnation of their per capita incomes. The rich had become richer and the poor had been consigned to inexorable poverty in unacceptably increasing numbers. The incidence of child poverty had increased rapidly and one third of the world's workforce was underemployed. Developing countries had to cope with the familiar diseases that had not been fully eradicated and also with newer diseases that were major causes of death in developed countries. Organized crime had grown to monumental proportions. As the report pointed out, there was a danger that history would repeat itself and that the majority of countries would be left to drift outside the mainstream of integration.

12. **Mr. Lyngdoh** (India), speaking as his country's first youth representative, said that more support should be given to the promotion and development of economically and environmentally sustainable livelihoods for young people, who would inherit many of the environmental, economic and social problems created over the past decades. The creation of sustainable livelihoods was an important factor in sustainable development as a whole.

13. Young people were the future leaders of their communities. Encouraging their involvement and investing in their key concerns should therefore be an urgent priority for Governments and civil society. International conferences had addressed the issue, but the resolutions emerging from them had not always been fully implemented. Young people had therefore decided to take action consistent with the commitments made by Governments. A great public gathering — the Youth Employment Summit — was to be held in the autumn of 2002, with the goal of launching a campaign of action to ensure that 500 million young adults would have productive and sustainable livelihoods by 2012.

14. Much remained to be done. With better policies and programmes in the areas of education, training and credit, young people would be better equipped to develop and sustain self-employment initiatives; and their improved skills and self-motivation would lead to greater social and economic productivity, as well as reducing the social and political problems due to youth unemployment. Since young people between 15 and 35 accounted for some 34 per cent of India's population, a national youth policy had been initiated and various programmes were being implemented to open up economic opportunities for young people and to develop their leadership qualities.

15. It would be better to speak of livelihood rather than employment since that was more in line with the reality faced by many young people in developing countries. Adaptability was the key. Governments should adopt strategies to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship, partnership with the private sector should be strengthened and the use of new information technologies to support youth employment should be encouraged. Young people themselves should be empowered to generate the solutions to youth unemployment, since they brought dedication and a sense of possibility to international planning. Youth organizations must keep up the pressure so as to forge a coherent follow-up to the commitments of Governments. He urged the Committee to embark on true partnership with young people in the international community.

16. **Mr. Sultan** (Israel) said that, although action by Governments in the field of social development was extremely important, it was never sufficient and must be complemented by the work of volunteers. His delegation therefore attached great importance to the proclamation of 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers.

17. His Government had played a pivotal role in ensuring access to all services for its people. An important advance had occurred in 1999, when the Knesset had expanded the scope of the compulsory education law to include children as young as three

years of age. In the field of health, the National Health Insurance Law was the primary achievement of the past five years. Its key provision was that health care was the right of all citizens. As for employment, equal opportunity had existed since 1959. In 1998 two new laws had been passed: the Law for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment and the Law for the Advancement of the Status of Women.

18. A large proportion of the State budget went on social services, one of the most important components of which was the National Insurance. The National Insurance Law had originally included only three insurance categories: old age, maternity and work injury. Those categories had gradually been extended and the country's national insurance system now included almost all the social security programmes employed by developed States to redistribute national income on the basis of social criteria. In 1996, a public council had been set up to reduce the gaps in society, enhance the work done by existing bodies and look for additional ways to advance the goal of social development. The results of the various initiatives could be easily quantified. Whereas in 1994 18 per cent of families in Israel had net incomes below the poverty line, by 1998 the figure had fallen to 16.6 per cent; however, much remained to be done.

19. Israel was eager to share its experience with other countries. To that end the Centre for International Cooperation (Mashav), established 40 years ago, cooperated with other nations. Over the past five years, some 20,000 participants from all over the world had taken part in courses on community development held by Mashav in its various training institutions in Israel and thousands more had benefited from the on-the-spot training courses in their own countries. Israel had thus contributed its best human resources to the alleviation of poverty and human suffering through international development cooperation.

20. **Ms. Alvarez** (Dominican Republic) said that while her delegation took immense satisfaction in the accomplishments of the recently concluded International Year of Older Persons, the Year must be considered a starting point for future actions rather than an end in itself. Her delegation therefore welcomed the offer of the Government of Spain to host the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002.

21. In looking ahead to that conference, it would be useful to try to understand why the International Plan of Action on Ageing adopted in 1982 had not been implemented. First, it had been geared towards the older persons of industrialized nations, rather than the elders of the developing countries, who would make up the majority of the world's elderly population for the foreseeable future. Next, although ambitious, it had lacked the necessary funding. Finally, it had failed to view older people as a resource for achieving its goals, treating them more as objects than as subjects of development.

22. Any treatment of policy issues resulting from the ageing of the population must be linked to issues of social and economic development, beginning with the preliminary work for the World Assembly. Failure to treat those themes together would undermine any plan of action and would ignore the social and economic environment in which the bulk of the ageing population would be living — the developing world.

23. **Mr. Arias** (Spain) said that Spain, which would be the hosting country of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, had carried out numerous activities during the International Year of Older Persons, culminating in the establishment of the State Council of Older Persons. To facilitate the preparatory process, his Government had made a voluntary contribution to finance the second meeting of the Technical Committee to be held in Santo Domingo at the end of October. In close collaboration with the Dominican Republic, Spain was promoting regular meetings of the Technical Committee which fostered an exchange of experiences and information among Governments, the agencies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. The Technical Committee should continue to play an active role during the preparatory process of the World Assembly. His Government had also announced a contribution to the United Nations Trust Fund for Ageing, designed to ensure the adequate presence and participation of the least developed countries. Preparations for the World Assembly were under way in Spain and were expected to be completed by the end of the year.

24. In conclusion, his delegation was convinced of the need for a global approach to issues related to ageing; he noted that 70 per cent of the population of older persons would soon be concentrated in the developing countries.

25. **Archbishop Renato R. Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) while welcoming the growing awareness

of human dignity, said that it was regrettable that the age of globalization, characterized by greater independence among States, had led to an even greater disparity in wealth and increased exploitations. He noted that development could not be limited to economics and politics but must pay attention to cultural, human and moral factors which dealt with the deepest questions of life were an equally important aspect of development. In that connection, the family played a critical role and constituted the ideal environment for the care of the young, the aged and the disabled.

26. Precisely because of the essentially moral character of development, the main obstacles to it would be overcome only by means of essentially moral decisions. The reforms called for in the international trading system, the world monetary and financial system and the exchange of technology would boost the development process only to the extent that people were viewed as the primary resource of any economy and of any society. The Holy See proposed a form of solidarity which raised interdependence to a moral plane. Such solidarity, based on the interdependence of economic, political, cultural and spiritual elements, should inspire the wealthy to feel responsible for the poor and the marginalized and help the weak and the poor to overcome passivity and hopelessness.

27. **Mr. Hollis** (Australia) said that Australia had strongly supported the International Year of Older Persons in 1999, and was continuing to promote its key objectives — independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity for older persons. Australia's approach to issues of ageing reflected an awareness of the contribution older persons could make to society and was aimed at laying the groundwork for a long-term and continuing focus on older persons and issues of ageing. Indeed, the theme for the Year had been adopted as Australia's national slogan: "Australia towards a society for all ages".

28. Partnerships between the Government and community groups had been a key element of Australia's activities during the Year and also of its efforts to transform perceptions of ageing. The Government had implemented a broad-based communications strategy, a national media campaign and had launched business and community partnerships aimed at publicizing the International Year of Older Persons and breaking down stereotypes, including of older women. Other initiatives to change the perception of older persons had been the introduction of the Government's Senior Australian of the Year Award in 1999 and, at the community level, the Commonwealth Recognition Awards for Senior Australians Programme to honour seniors who were outstanding role models in the community.

29. National research comparing attitudes towards older persons in 1998 and 2000 showed significant progress in eliminating negative stereotypes. National media and advertising awards introduced during the International Year would continue to be given in order to reinforce the positive portrayal of older Australians. The National Strategy for an Ageing Australia would be finalized by 2001 and would generate complementary strategies in the Australian states and territories. It would constitute a long-term and coordinated policy response to issues associated with a rapidly ageing population. In conclusion, his delegation planned to play a constructive role in the second World Assembly on Ageing.

30. **Ms. G/Marian** (Ethiopia) said her Government had been taking specific measures to enhance social development and improve the well-being of its people. Its Developmental Social Welfare Policy, which targeted families, children, youth, women, older persons, persons with disabilities and other socially vulnerable groups, was aimed at alleviating poverty, promoting social integration and creating productive employment. The Policy emphasized the role of communities, civil society, non-governmental organizations and the Government.

31. Like the youth in many least developed African countries, Ethiopian youth were victims of unbalanced demographic growth, natural and man-made disasters and the scourge of diseases such as acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). Due to limited access to training and educational opportunities and an acute shortage of recreation and sports centres, they became victims of alcohol, drug abuse, delinquency and criminal activity. In order to deal with rampant unemployment among youth, her Government had established skill development centres, which it hoped to extend to different parts of the country. Efforts were also being made to enhance the participation of girls in educational and vocational training.

32. While stressing the importance of the family unit, she noted that an estimated 60 per cent of Ethiopian families, the majority of them female-headed, lived in

abject poverty. Alleviating poverty and protecting the basic rights of women were the cornerstone of Ethiopian national social policy. In that connection, all discriminatory provisions relating to marriage and family had been eliminated from the Civil Code. In an effort to strengthen and sustain family ties, training in family guidance and counselling was being offered to appropriate institutions at the national and regional levels. Guidelines in that area had also been prepared for non-governmental organizations.

33. In Ethiopia, as in many African countries, the family traditionally took care of older persons and persons with disabilities. With increasing poverty and developmental changes, however, the role of the family was diminishing. The Government was therefore attempting to provide support to older persons. Senior citizens could benefit from a credit scheme recently launched by the Rehabilitation Affairs Department of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. The Department was also seeking to change negative attitudes and stereotypes by raising public awareness of the contribution that older persons could make to society. Preparations were also under way to celebrate the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October. The Government was supporting senior citizens' associations and organizations. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and HelpAge International were assisting in the establishment of the National Association of Seniors.

34. As for persons with disabilities, a National Programme of Action, focusing on prevention and rehabilitation, had been elaborated in June 1999 on the basis of the Developmental Social Welfare Policy and the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities. Efforts were being made by the Government, non-governmental organizations and associations of persons with disabilities to improve the living conditions of the disabled through, inter alia, institutional care, community-based rehabilitation programmes, income-generating activities, orthopaedic and prosthetic appliances, education and health services, job opportunities, financial assistance and public awareness activities.

35. The attainment of social development goals was the responsibility of each individual nation; however, international assistance to Africa was necessary to help eliminate tremendous obstacles to the continent's social and economic development. In conclusion, her delegation looked forward to the full implementation of the outcome of the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly.

36. **Mr. Mei Yuncai** (China) said that his delegation welcomed the decision to convene the second World Assembly on Ageing. The opportunity to adopt a revised plan of action and formulate a long-term strategy on ageing would contribute to social development. It was estimated that, by the year 2020, there would be 230 million older persons in China, accounting for 15.6 per cent of the national population. The Government was taking very active measures for its growing elderly population, including the establishment of a social security system for older persons with the participation of the State, the community, families and individuals. At the international level, too, cooperation must be strengthened in order to deal with the rapidly increasing population of older persons and integrate them in society.

37. **Ms. Austria-Garcia** (Philippines) said that the activities undertaken by Member States to address the plight of the elderly were manifestations of serious efforts to meet the needs of the ageing population in a changing world.

38. The Philippines had celebrated the International Year of Older Persons by adopting a national plan of action for older persons for the period 1999-2004. Its aim was to promote healthy ageing through the promotion of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity.

39. According to global demographic projections, the elderly would account for one fifth of the world's population by 2050, underscoring the need to mobilize the skills and expertise of older persons and to utilize their potential as a development force. That posed a challenge to policy-makers in developing economies, however, as the number of elderly without homes, pensions or benefits continued to rise. Her delegation also noted with concern the issue of human rights for older persons, particularly women, who were subjected to structural inequalities, social and economic exclusion, abuse and negative and misleading stereotypes.

40. The Philippines welcomed the research already undertaken, which would enrich the discussions on an updated plan of action on ageing. It supported the four dimensional framework for a society for all ages

outlined in the Secretary-General's report (A/55/167), which comprised the situation of older persons, lifelong individual development, multigenerational relationships and the interplay between population ageing and development — would be pursued. Her Government was interested in continuing the discussion on best practices in addressing the needs of ageing populations as a means of developing an integrated and effective approach that would address the needs of an ageing population worldwide.

41. **Mr. Boldt** (Germany) said that, to a large extent, fundamental social, economic and cultural challenges were triggered by demographic change, and the main demographic issue of the coming century would be ageing. The debate on that topic would affect the shape of future societies, and policies must be developed that met the needs of the elderly as people, as well as of societies as a whole. National infrastructure to support age-related policies was thus crucial.

42. Against that background, the General Assembly decision to revise the International Plan of Action on Ageing and the decision by the Economic Commission for Europe to adopt a regional strategy had helped to continue the momentum created during the International Year of Older Persons, and the preparatory process for the Second World Assembly on Ageing would provide further opportunities.

43. At the national level, his Government had set up a national agency to carry out its preparatory activities which had already convened a number of seminars and commissioned studies, the results of which would be presented at the forthcoming session of the Commission for Social Development.

44. **Ms. Korneliouk** (Belarus) said that her delegation had welcomed the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly particularly the focus on the interests of countries with economies in transition. Belarus had been pleased to be able to share its experience in addressing the main problems of transition economies: unemployment, a decline in population and erosion of living standards.

45. Population ageing was an important issue in Belarus. In 1990, the elderly had represented 19 per cent of the population; by 1999 that percentage had risen to 24.5 per cent. Regrettably, the elderly had borne the brunt of the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster and the economic hardships during the transition period. As a result, life expectancy had dropped by 2 years for women and 4.1 years for men.

46. Her Government did not consider the observance of the International Year of Older Persons to be a one-time event. The measures proposed as part of that observance had been incorporated into its social policy, including stronger legal protection for the elderly, reform of the pension system, improvements in health care and availability of medicines, and the development of a network of social services for its older citizens.

47. *Ms. Gittens-Joseph (Trinidad and Tobago), Chairperson, resumed the Chair.*

48. **Mr. Shobokshi** (Saudi Arabia) said that in view of the great scientific and technological advances of recent years, it was distressing to see that the gap between advanced and developing countries in the area of social development was widening.

49. Saudi Arabia's own development plans sought to ensure that all members of society would enjoy enhanced benefits and opportunities while being protected from the negative impact of rapid economic and social change. To that end, the Government had established social development centres throughout the country to help people, especially women and youth, adapt to change and take advantage of it within a context of Islamic values, and to contribute to socially relevant programmes such as those relating to mother and child welfare, disabled persons, and environmentally friendly industrial and agricultural operations. The Government had also established a social security system for those in need.

50. Disabled persons were provided with appropriate training and guidance aimed at enabling them to develop their abilities and find fulfilment and satisfaction as productive members of society. Financial assistance was also made available to the families of children with disabilities.

51. The elderly were cherished, respected and cared for in Saudi society. It was essential to strive to ensure that the impetus generated during the International Year of Older Persons was maintained.

52. When all was said and done, it was regrettable that some countries should enjoy development and prosperity while others were racked with poverty, disease and armed conflict. More effective means of development should be sought, and the developed

countries should do their utmost to help the developing countries adjust to the inexorable trend towards globalization.

53. **Mr. Dorji** (Bhutan) said that while national Governments must bear primary responsibility for socio-economic development, in an interdependent world, many could achieve meaningful success without support from the international community. The direction, pace and impact of globalization must be guided so as to ensure that it served to enhance the greater common interest. Eradication of poverty was a global challenge calling for a global response, and the United Nations must be at the forefront of that effort.

54. As a landlocked least developed country, Bhutan faced daunting challenges in its efforts at social development. Its rugged terrain and scattered settlements had added to the cost of providing and maintaining the infrastructure and services required to achieve improvements in welfare and well-being. However, under the enlightened leadership of its King, Bhutan had made remarkable progress over the past four decades. It had done so by adopting a holistic approach to development that was people-centred, ensuring effective participation in decision-making from the village level onward and giving high priority to social sectors and environmental management. The Government called that approach maximizing "Gross National Happiness", because it would ensure that, in the process of development and provision of basic needs, humanity would not lose its soul. Bhutan was confident that, with the support of its development partners, it would be able to overcome the obstacles it faced and meet the aspirations of its people.

55. **Ms. Elisha** (Benin) said that she wished to highlight the theme of productive employment, for employment played a crucial role in eradicating poverty, reducing exclusion and restoring human dignity. Two billion new jobs would need to be created over the next two decades to meet the needs of the developing world. Most research on employment, however, focused on the modern, organized sector, whereas vast segments of the world economy lay in the informal sector.

56. The true measure of the employment crisis could be seen through the interrelated phenomena of under-employment, unemployment among young people, and child labour. One third of the workforce in developing countries survived through subsistence agriculture or the informal sector and did not have sufficient income to buy, trade or produce enough food. In addition, 85 per cent of youth between ages 15 and 24 lived in developing countries, and over half of them did not attend school or hold a job. Some 250 million school-aged children also worked in order to contribute to the family income.

57. Development and growth strategies should aim at job creation. In Africa, for example, where agriculture employed 70 per cent of the workforce, increasing production and investment in the agricultural sector should be given the highest priority.

58. Globalization was characterized by rapid changes and interconnections. It had long been said that rather than give someone a fish, it was better to teach him to fish, but currently, he must also be taught to market his fish, protect his traditional fisheries from poachers and commercial exploitation, prevent pollution and grasp the concept of ecological sustainability. In other words, a coherent and integrated approach to inter-sectoral issues was needed.

59. The human, material and financial resources to confront these challenges were available; the missing element was the will to fulfil commitments. The rule of law and respect for contractual obligations were key to trade liberalization and growth, and would also strengthen social cohesion. Benin renewed its commitment to the actions it had agreed to undertake in the social development sector, and called on the international community to do likewise.

The meeting rose at 12.05 p.m.